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# INQUIRIES UNSETTLE ISRAELI POLITICIANS

## Threat to Leadership Seen in What Might Be Found on Iran Deals and Spying

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Special to The New York Times

JERUSALEM, April 11 — Behind the pre-Passover calm that traditionally envelops Israel this time of year some time bombs are ticking away beneath Israel's political establishment, and they have within them the power to change the face of Israeli politics.

They could turn out to be duds, but for now politicians are taking them quite seriously. Already the politicians have quietly begun maneuvering for the potential morning after.

A small item in the newspaper Hada-shot captured the flavor of things. It reported that the secretary general of the Histadrut labor federation, Yisrael Kessar, and some other senior Labor politicians, were testing support in party branches and preparing to contend for the prime ministership in the event that Israel's ruling triumvirate — Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin — is forced to resign soon.

### 'Politicians Smell Blood'

"The politicians smell blood," said the Israeli historian Shabtai Teveth.

That scent emanates largely from investigations being conducted by the Israeli Parliament into the Jonathan Jay Pollard spying affair, and by the American Congress and special prosecutor into the Iran-contra arms affair. It is considered possible here that any of these investigations could produce conclusions in the next few weeks that would force Mr. Shamir, Mr. Peres and Mr. Rabin to step down.

In Israel, the Parliament's Foreign Affairs intelligence subcommittee, led by Abba Eban, is investigating the Pollard scandal, with particular emphasis on whether Israel's political leaders had knowledge of, or involvement in, the embarrassing espionage affair. Another Cabinet-appointed committee, headed by a retired general, Zvi Tzur, and a prominent lawyer, Yehoshua Rotenstreich, is also investigating the case.

The Eban committee will probably finish first and issue a report in May. If it concludes that the key figures in the Pollard affair, Col. Aviem Sella of the Israeli Air Force and Rafael Eitan, acted, as the political leaders say, entirely on their own without ever informing the political echelon, it can expect great skepticism and derision in Israel and Washington.

If, however, Mr. Eban's committee finds that Colonel Sella acted with permission from his military superiors or that Mr. Eitan passed on intelligence in a way that made it impossible for the top political leaders not to know that a spying operation was going on in America, it could topple a row of dominos that would reach the three top leaders.

"The public is sick and tired of the clerks always paying the price, while the politicians get off scot-free," said Mr. Teveth, the historian.

"This time around," he said, "no one will be satisfied if just the operational people are punished."

Although no one would expect a man of Mr. Eban's integrity to color the findings of his committee's report, the panel is not innocent of political motives. Mr. Eban himself has an old political score to settle with Mr. Rabin, who, when he was Ambassador in Washington and Mr. Eban was Foreign Minister, treated Mr. Eban with contempt, and has continued to do so.

As for the Iran-contra affair, Israel's leaders have repeatedly said that no Israelis profited from the Iran dealings, handled money or had anything to do with the contras' funding.

### Anxiety on North and Poindexter

These denials are based almost entirely on the word of Amiram Nir, who was the principal Israeli liaison to two key American figures in the Iran affair, Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter and Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North, during a period about which questions of accounting for large sums of money remain unanswered.

It would be an understatement to say that there is concern among Israel's top leaders as to how Admiral Poindexter and Colonel North will describe the Israeli role, and whether their version will correspond with that of Mr. Nir, who says his hands are clean.

One reason Israel has delayed answering the questions of American investigators about its role in the Iran affair is because Jerusalem is finding it difficult to explain some of Mr. Nir's moves to the Americans, the newspaper Hada-shot reported.

The Israeli public may not care enough about the Iran affair to demand ministerial accountability, no matter what emerges, said Amir Oren, diplomatic correspondent for the newspaper Davar. But the Pollard investigations, he said, is more explosive, although not necessarily lethal.

### Possibility of Leaders' Survival

"I could see Rabin and Peres accepting ministerial responsibility for Pollard, bringing down the Government and calling for new elections," Mr. Oren said. "They would then go to the Labor Party and say: 'Look, we have taken responsibility, showed we are in favor of clean government. Now reelect us to head the party ticket for the next elections.'"

If the Labor Party had a clear heir apparent, "Peres and Rabin would be finished," the Israeli political scientist Daniel J. Elazar said.

"But for now," he said, "it is not certain that there is anyone who can challenge them."

As for Likud, Mr. Elazar said, "the Pollard case is not the kind of issue that would automatically exercise that party enough to force Shamir out, particularly since his biggest threat would probably be from Sharon, who is not likely to challenge Shamir on the issue of morality of statecraft."